

Slow to anger

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- [0 : 0 0] Proverbs 29, verse 22. A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression. Proverbs 19, verse 19.
- A man of great wrath will pay the penalty, for if you deliver him, you will only have to do it again. Proverbs 20, verse 22.
- Do not say, I will repay evil. Wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you. Proverbs 29, verse 11.
- A fool gives full bent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back. Proverbs 14, verse 29.
- Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, and he who has a hasty temper exalts folly. Proverbs 12, verse 16.
- [1 : 0 7] The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult. Proverbs 19, verse 11.
- Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense. Proverbs 15, verse 1.
- A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Proverbs 15, verse 18.
- A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention. Proverbs 10, verse 12.
- Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses. Proverbs 25, verses 21 to 22.
- [2 : 1 0] If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. For you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.
- James 1, verses 19 to 21. Know this, my beloved brothers. Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, or that anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.
- Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save souls. Well, good morning, everyone.
- Well, you might have noticed already that we're getting into Proverbs, so we're getting back into our holiday series in wisdom literature, and we're going to be wrapping up Proverbs. I don't know if you ever can wrap up Proverbs.
- There's so much in it, but we are. So we've got three more weeks. This one is on anger, as you can tell. And next week will be on living wisely in a post-Christian world.
- [3 : 2 1] And then we're going to wrap up in Chapter 31, that elusive woman, the woman of wisdom. Then in Term 1, we're going to be getting into the Book of Romans to get into that core foundational truth that we find in Romans, just to get our orientation right as we head into the new year.

So I hope you're looking forward to that. Will you pray with me as we get into God's word? Let's pray together. Yeah, Lord, if there's any emotion that has led to the destruction of your image bearers themselves and to the destruction of relationships and wreaked havoc in your church and between husbands and wives and parents and children and friendships, Lord, anger must be up there, if not the top of the list.

Lord, I pray, I suppose what we just prayed in that song, that you would give us an undivided heart, that you would change us, sanctify us that little bit more today.

Lord, we need your word, not only so that life will go well, but so that we live in a way that pleases you and represents you well.

Lord, it's just so lovely that you send the rain and just refreshes the earth, like you give us that picture in Isaiah. I pray that your word would send it.

[5 : 02] May it fall down and wash our hearts this morning, that we might be slow to anger like you are. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Well, to get into this, I'm going to borrow a very ordinary situation story from a book by Larry Crabb.

Now, the technology, you understand once I say the story, but the technology you might need to update a little bit, but I think we can all still resonate with the situation and I think we can apply it.

It's a husband and wife situation, but we can apply it to any relationship, I think. So, the wife retells what happened. So, this is her words. We each had really bad days and all we wanted to do was relax in front of the TV.

As soon as we both were settled and comfortable, the phone rang. Neither of us moved. After about three rings, my husband said in the most tired voice, Honey, could you get it?

Well, I immediately felt irritated. I knew he was going to ask me to get up. I was tired too, and I felt like I'm always the one who waits on him.

[6 : 13] So, I said, I just got comfortable. I wish you'd get it this time. Well, you would have thought I asked him to run to the store at midnight. He stared at me for a second with utter disgust.

Then he got up. By the time he got there, the phone had stopped. We barely said a word to each other the rest of the evening. That's the story.

Now, I've picked this story to lead into this topic for a few reasons. You might be on the receiving end of some very destructive anger, whether verbally or physically.

It could be criminal. And that's not okay. And there's people to help. There's pastors, there's psychologists, there's police. My focus today, though, is on anger at the level of that story.

The kind of everyday anger that we all feel in every relationship, nearly every day. So, I just want that story to be a picture of kind of the scope of what we're trying to cover today.

[7 : 22] Another reason for... I like this story is to hopefully hold up something of a mirror in case you don't think you're an angry person. It's such a small situation, like a phone ringing.

You just want to both relax. There's politeness in the words. Honey, I'm comfortable. Can't you do it this time? Like, it's polite. It's civil. And yet you can feel the hurt.

You can feel the anger in the room. It's the silence. It's the stare of the eyes. It's seething inside, but not actually expressing what you're feeling.

And it destroyed the freedom of that relationship, at least for the rest of the evening. And if it was a pattern of relating, who knows what else it would destroy. It's such a simple thing, and that's why I find it so powerful.

Anger is destructive, and I think we're all angry people. I'm still learning to express my anger in constructive ways.

- [8 : 24] Like, I used to... Not that Emma would ever do anything to cause me to be upset, but I used to... I would be passive-aggressive towards her and try the silent treatment and being short in my replies and avoiding her.
- And there was just one problem. She had no idea that I was upset, and it just didn't work. If you're down the passive-aggressive end of the spectrum of anger like I am, just stop for a second and think about what you're doing.
- You hurt me, so I will try and hurt you by withdrawing my love from you. That's brutal. It's destructive.
- I'm probably saying that harsher because I'm talking to myself there. We all have a problem with anger. And it seems to be a growing problem with this pandemic.
- Bo Wong shared an article with me, A Nation on Hold Wants to Speak to the Manager. Many customer relation jobs are just... They're fed up of the anger of customers recently, especially on airlines and in supermarkets and in restaurants and things.
- [9 : 43] People get angry over masks. I think there's one employee sums it up, saying, Have you seen a man in his 60s have a temper tantrum because we don't have the expensive imported cheese he wants?
- A man in his 60s at Woolies having a temper tantrum in the middle of the aisle. You're looking at someone and thinking, I don't think this is about the cheese. That's the state of our society at the moment.
- In our relationships, in our society, there's an anger problem. But then, is it a problem? Have you found it's common to hear at the moment that expressing anger is a good thing?
- I'm being authentic. I'm being real. I'm wearing my heart on my sleeve. I'm being myself. People need to accept me and acknowledge my feelings, acknowledge the hurt that's been done to me.
- Being authentic and venting your anger avoids bottling it up so that it doesn't explode in more destructive ways. People aren't in the dark about what you're thinking. You've just laid it bare.
- [11 : 00] And shouldn't you stand up for yourself and defend yourself? Our world is kind of saying at the moment that anger is good. As we get into God's word, we're going to see that God gives us a better way, a better way to live.
- That's what we always find in God's word. He has a better way than authentically venting your anger. One of the main things he says again and again is, I don't know if you picked it up as it was being read out, be slow to anger.
- So Proverbs 19.11. Good sense makes one slow to anger and it is his glory to overlook an offence.
- And again, Proverbs 29.11. A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.
- Notice in these that the offence is felt, the offence occurred. You may well arrive at anger, but be slow to it.
- [12 : 16] Good sense, God says, isn't showcasing your anger right away, but good sense, you'll be slow to anger. And that got me thinking, like, why? Why is that? Because the times I've tried to be slow to anger, like I've already said, it often just comes out in more destructive ways later.
- It's not like delaying it makes it go away. Not all the time. Maybe if it's a tiny thing, it does. So why be slow to anger?

I think there's four reasons, and I hope to step us through it. There might be more reasons, but let's go through these four. I think the first reason we should be slow to anger and not just authentically blowing our top off whenever we're angry is to prevent the relational carnage that anger causes.

So Proverbs 29, 22. A man, a person of wrath, stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression.

So the feeling of anger isn't wrong, but letting your anger take control of you to then lead to wrong choices that do damage to relationships, that's the problem.

[13 : 34] Someone described anger, someone I read this week, described anger as a gateway drug to many other sins. Just spend a moment and reflect on words and actions that you regret.

What words do you regret recently? Or maybe in the past, I don't know. How many of those were prompted by your anger? That harsh word, the emotional payback, making that person feel scared, making that person feel small, making them feel unwanted, retaliating, hurt for hurt, like a tennis match.

What's the cost? It's not easy to take words back, is it? Do you notice the trust that takes weeks and months and years to build is just torn down so quickly with those harsh words?

The cost of cooperation, the cost of, like that story of the husband and wife, of being relaxed in each other's presence, the loss of intimacy. There's a cost to the honour of God.

There's a big cost. There's a relational cost. And that's a pretty good reason to just pause in our anger before just letting fly.

[15 : 03] And it's not just damaging to other people. It's actually damaging to ourselves. So Proverbs 19, 19, a man of great wrath will pay the penalty. For if you deliver him, you will only have to do it again.

I think this is talking about the natural consequences of my anger, your anger. If you're quick to lose your temper, others will lower their trust in you.

They'll learn to manage you rather than feel safe with you. They'll learn to fear you rather than trust you. There's a cost to you.

There's consequences. It may just be in certain situations. It's like, don't raise that topic with that person. Like, you'll get an earful.

Or maybe it's just, generally, people will lose respect and trust, cooperation with you. So there's a cost. Relationally, there's a cost to you.

[16 : 04] There's consequences. So let's be slow to anger for relationship's sake. And as Christians, we should be slow for God's reputation's sake. I think a second reason to be slow to anger is to work out whether or not I should be angry.

Should you be angry? We think that it's the situation itself that makes us angry, but that's not good sense. You need time to look inside yourself to see, why am I angry in this moment?

First, we need to understand what anger is. I've found two descriptions helpful. One is, anger is a blocked goal, and I'll give a description of that in a moment. So you have a goal, it's been blocked, that produces anger.

A second, which I heard in a talk years ago and it stuck with me, is that anger is personal hurt wrapped in barbed wire. I just thought it was a good image.

It's like, you're hurt, and so you intentionally wrap that hurt in barbed wire and kind of throw it back. That image has stuck with me. So going back to the blocked goal.

[17 : 21] So in a TED Talk, a psychologist describes anger. If you're going to visually imagine what's going on inside you, it looks a lot like driving on the roads, which is probably why there's road rage all the time.

So just imagine, each person is in their car and we're driving on the same space, interacting, and when you're driving, you have a goal. You have a destination you're trying to get to.

But imagine someone cuts into your lane, slows down, and then makes you miss that green light and you have to stop and wait a couple minutes for the light to go green again.

Your goal has been blocked. Producing anger. Well, not necessarily. Imagine it's a Sunday afternoon. Yes, you want to get home, but you've got no deadline.

Would you be angry? Maybe if you felt like your rights have been impinged or something, but if you didn't care about that, you don't have to respond in anger. What is more important is what's going on inside your car, if I can use that expression.

[18 : 30] That will be the critical thing of whether you get angry or not. Imagine if that person cut in front of you and you're on the way to a job interview and you're already running late, you're financially under pressure, you need this job, you need it to look after your family, your reputation is going to be impacted because you're going to be even later to the job interview, then that person cutting in, oh, it is unforgivable.

It's punishable. Do you see the difference? It's the same external situation and yet what's happening inside your car makes all the difference about whether you get angry or not.

Going back to that article Beau shared, someone described the increasing anger in society. I think they were on the money when they said it like this. That waiter at the restaurant, that flight attendant, they become a stand-in for everything coming between what we experience and what we think we're entitled to.

They're blocking our goal of what we're entitled to, in other words. And so they just cop it. If you just authentically fly off the handle, you haven't taken the time to work out what's causing your anger.

More often than not, I find it's what's inside my car, inside my heart, my thinking, that's causing the anger, not the external circumstances.

[20 : 03] So we need to be slow to anger to work out what goal is being blocked. Is it my goal or is it the Lord's goal? So, is it my reputation and expectations, entitlements, that's being blocked?

Let me give a personal example for this one. There's always a danger in personal examples. I don't want to make it about myself, but I think it will illustrate it. And hopefully you can think about what you're feeling at the moment.

I've used this illustration way too much recently, but I'll use it again. Samuel's sleep. I've been quick to anger recently.

I told Emma what the topic was this week and she laughed, just knowing the irony of it and God's grace in it as well. I've been quick to anger.

Sam is still not sleeping well. We've tried a whole bunch of things. But, now you think, the goal is clear, I want a good night's rest. It's happening to me. I'm not the cause of it.

[21 : 11] It's happening to me. But does that mean I have to get angry? Do I have a choice? Looking inside the car, I need to understand my deeper goal.

Why do I think I'm entitled to a good night's sleep? I've been reflecting on it and let me just share what I think my goal is at the moment.

I think it's something like this. I want to be competent in my responsibilities as a man and I want to be seen to be competent and I need sleep to do that. I think it's something like that going on for me at the moment.

And Sam is blocking that goal. But it's not him causing the anger. It's that goal which is wrong that's causing the anger.

Or that thinking I'm entitled to sleep or that God demands that I need sleep to achieve that. So I think James 4. I don't think I'm making this up.

[22 : 18] I think it's in James 4, 1-4. What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this? That your passions are at war within you.

You desire and do not have so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You do not receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your own passions.

So when we feel anger we want to rush in and presume the offender is guilty and deserves punishment. But wisdom tells us to pause and check your own heart.

Check what's in the car. What's under the hood. Check for the idols in our heart. The good things you believe you are entitled to and must have. So what have you been angry about lately?

You might want to write it down if you're taking notes. What have you been angry about lately? Check what's under the hood. What goal is there? The deeper goal.

[23 : 22] What goal is there? What is it about your sense of person, your reputation that you feel is being threatened? What do you think you're entitled to? Let's be slow to anger and examine ourselves.

And if you find like me that more often than not there's some idol lurking there, confess it to God. Confess it to the person you've been angry to and tweak your goal.

Maybe the goal is okay but it's just out of order. It's not in its proper order. So what if you find, after examining, what if you find that your goal isn't your own making?

What if it is primarily the Lord's reputation that has been damaged and you're angry about that? What if it's his expectations, what he is entitled to that has been crossed?

Well, I think talking like this helps us affirm that there is good things to be angry about.

[24 : 34] But let's hear Proverbs 20, 22 for advice from the Lord of what to do in that situation. Do not say, I will repay evil.

Wait for the Lord and he will deliver you. So there is such a thing as evil. I think we call it in Christian circles righteous anger.

Now I want to pause at that point and go, if by righteous anger you mean that you believe something is wrong in its own right and therefore you are entitled to be angry, I can't see anything Christian about that definition of righteous anger.

Everyone thinks that way. If you think it's wrong and therefore you're entitled to be angry. I don't think that's a good enough definition. If you mean by righteous anger that what is being done is against God's will and his name and reputation is being injured, his purposes are being blocked, of course the Lord is sovereign over those but if that's what you mean then okay, there is such a thing as righteous anger.

Jesus was angry. You read the Gospels and there was times where he was angry but he was angry because the glory belonging to God was not being given to God.

[26 : 00] I suspect we don't feel this kind of anger nearly enough. I could be wrong about that but I suspect that's our problem. Maybe we should be more angry.

I think for righteous anger we're on safer grounds when we're feeling it on behalf of others and especially those who are vulnerable. people. The other thing this proverb teaches us is that he promises to deliver us in the end.

To take the matter into our own hands to get justice right now is to take the moral high ground that only the Lord is entitled to. So have you ever said or thought about a person I would never do what they did?

That's taking the moral high ground. Only the Lord knows precisely what someone deserves. Only he can see people's heart perfectly.

And only the Lord is completely holy and can say I would never do what they did. I think we should care deeply about evil.

[27 : 08] Don't get me wrong. We should care deeply about evil when God's reputation is at stake. But vengeance isn't ours. It belongs to him.

He's the judge and he calls us to love our enemies and wait for his deliverance. So either way when we look in our own car under our own hood and see what goal is being blocked either way if it's the idols of our heart or if it's the Lord's name and his expectations being blocked either way the remedy I think is the same and that's what we find in James chapter 1.

I don't think the remedy is Buddhist meditation trying to remove all desire nor is it taking God's place as judge of right and wrong and quickly showing how authentically foolish you are.

We find the solution in James chapter 1 that we are given the resources if we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. The resources to deal with our anger isn't out there.

We don't have to say it's implanted in us that we're going to find. So James chapter 1 Know this my beloved brothers and sisters. I just want to pause there because at first reading of this I skipped over it but there's a very important word there beloved.

[28 : 38] We are beloved by the Lord if you are in the Lord Jesus Christ. Put that alongside what God is about to say.

Let every person be quick to hear slow to speak slow to anger for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God therefore put away all filthiness and rampant out of control wickedness the Lord knows the unlovely things in our heart and he knows the unlovely things we do because of our anger and yet he calls us beloved.

How is that possible? We're to put those ugly things away and receive with meekness with gentleness humility the implanted word which is able to save your souls.

I think this is the word of the gospel of the Lord Jesus the one who had every right to be angry wrathful at my self-defending idolatrous anger he chose to make me his beloved and he did it through costly love rather than punishing or threatening.

so whether I find inside goals of my own making idols that are creating this anger it's this implanted word that I need I need the word of the gospel but what reputation is greater than I am beloved by the Lord you will not find a better reputation a better name for yourself whether people acknowledge or not it doesn't matter and what can I be entitled to if he is Lord I'm not what can I be entitled to if everything I have is by his grace so if it's the idols of your heart producing the anger it's this implanted word we need and if it is righteous goals that you're angry about he gives us the example to follow he chose not to attack the person but to attack the person's sin through costly love so either way it's the word of the gospel that puts our goals in order we don't have to defend ourselves but we can choose to respond with love this is at the very heart of the God we worship

[31 : 21] Moses saw this on the mountain when God passed in front of him declaring his glory so do you remember Exodus 34 the Lord the Lord a God merciful and gracious slow to anger this is at the heart of the God we worship slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness what Moses saw being declared was embodied perfectly by the Lord Jesus his son so 1 Peter 2 is a lovely description of it when Jesus when he was reviled he did not revile in return when he suffered he did not threaten but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live for righteousness by his wounds you have been healed for you were straying like sheep but have now returned the shepherd and overseer of your souls aren't you so glad if you just like all my sin

I probably know like just the tip of the iceberg aren't you so glad that God is a God who is slow to anger so slow he even took my sin upon himself to deal with the gap between our relationship I'll never taste a drop of his eternal anger discipline yes but he only disciplines those he loves we will never taste a drop of his anger he is slow to anger if we don't worship this in our God then you can't produce it any other way I don't think this slow to anger God calls us to bring glory to his reputation by being like him and we can only do that by accepting that implanted word of the gospel that he conquered our sinful anger through his costly love so I just want to finish with some proverbs that give us some concrete examples of how we can honour the

Lord in responding with love rather than out of control anger firstly we can love those who are angry at us by not retaliating but responding with calm and gentle words so Don helped us and the children understand this one 15 one a soft answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs up anger just because someone is engaging with hostility even if it's passive aggressive hostility we don't have to respond in kind if we are trusting that we are safe in Christ we don't have to respond like that I think the second advice that proverbs gives us guidance is that we are called not just to control our anger or to express our anger in constructive ways but to positively love the person in return so proverbs 10 12 hatred stirs up strife but love covers all offences now that word covers it's not saying covers up it's not just cover up anything anyone's done wrong

I think it's the opposite of stripping them isn't that what anger tries to do anger wrapped in barbed wire you're trying to strip that person of I don't know of their reputation of what they want but love covers up it serves it sees them in the best possible light it serves their interests their real interests not necessarily their immediate interests it seeks their good love covers up offences and it doesn't take much for one soft word one act of love to just turn a relationship have you found that you're in an argument and it doesn't take much the Lord calls us to be the one to initiate that and then Proverbs 25 21 to 22 if your enemy is hungry give him bread to eat if he's thirsty give him water to drink for you will heap burning coals on his head and the

Lord will reward you sounds like the goal is to inflict pain but I don't think so it's not going I'm better than you by serving you it's going I'm not going to engage the way you are in this hostility I'm going to serve you and do you know what that does to the person it doesn't annoy you when you just want to be mean to someone but they keep being nice to you it convicts you doesn't it I think that's what it's talking about the answer to the destructiveness of anger is to serve and that actually will help that person be convicted before the Lord so I just want to finish up by saying do you know what I think is way better than authentically just blowing your top off anger like that's what our world says to do with anger do you know what's better than that I think what's better is that we can authentically display the character of our slow to anger

[37 : 04] God by trusting Jesus costly love for us you can just authentically blow your top off or you can authentically display the God who is slow to anger and and that will please him that will help the people you're engaging with may God help us with that let me pray and ask for that help let's pray Lord cause us to worship you because you are slow to anger your patience I think it's underrated your patience with us is incredible that you convict us of our sin that you don't wipe us out immediately even though you alone are entitled to that you even took the thing that offended you you wore it yourself you took it yourself so that we could know that we are beloved by you it is incredible slowness to anger forgive us for when we think that you fly off the handle you were not like that please change our image of you if we're thinking that and Lord help us to relate in the church in our families at work places friendships

Lord please help us to honour you by being slow to anger help us to see the idols of our heart and confess it and help us to worship you in Jesus name I pray Amen